

VZCZCXYZ0001
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHNE #1226/01 1631527
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 121527Z JUN 09
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6983
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7773
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 3512
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 6513
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1794
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1384
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 8173
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 8410
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS NEW DELHI 001226

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV PTER PREL PINR KDEM IN
SUBJECT: INDIAN "YOUTH WAVE": NEW STARS IN THE PARLIAMENT
PANTHEON

REF: A. NEW DELHI 1083
B. NEW DELHI 1072

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Media coverage of the 2009 parliamentary election highlighted the possible emergence of a generational change in Indian politics, with the spotlight on Rahul Gandhi as well as a large contingent of young contestants vying for seats in the Lok Sabha (the lower house of Parliament). Seventy-nine of the new Lok Sabha's 543 members are under the age of 40. As the media played it, these young MPs represent the future leaders of India and embody the hopes and aspirations of a very young India, where 65 percent of the total population is under the age of 35. There may be less to this "youth wave" in Indian politics than suggested by the Bollywood-style breathless media attention paid to these young political stars. Many, perhaps even a majority, of these young MPs are merely scions of India's powerful political families and could represent a continuation of the "old guard" Indian political establishment rather than any substantive change. Others have been hand-picked by Rahul Gandhi, and for them loyalty to the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty is the primary political anchor. End Summary.

Youth Wave: More Hype Than Substance?

¶2. (U) Political analysts have long been forecasting the emergence of younger leaders on the national political scene. In the run-up to parliamentary elections in April-May, local press followed closely the political campaigns of Rahul Gandhi and other fresh-faced politicians. These future leaders were made out to represent the "hopes and aspirations" of India's sizeable youth population, in which 65 percent of India's 1.15 billion population is under the age of 35. However, some political observers believe the "youth wave" is media hype and will have minimal impact on the Indian political landscape. They point out that this Lok Sabha is only slightly younger than the previous -- 79 MPs below 40 in this parliament versus 60 in the preceding parliament. Political contacts also noted that only six of these MPs have found their way in to the Council of Ministers, all as junior ministers, and none in the cabinet or with independent charge of a portfolio.

Politics in the Blood

¶3. (U) Most of the young MPs from the 15th Lok Sabha hail from political dynasties, coupling youthful vigor with instant name recognition and deep ties to the old guard political establishment. Three of teh young ministers owe their election and jobs to their parents. U.S-educated Sachin Pilot, two-time MP from Rajasthan, is the son of Congress Party heavyweight, Rajesh Pilot. Agatha Sangma, MP from Meghalaya and the youngest member of the Council of Ministers, is the daughter of Nationalist Congress Party leader and former Lok Sabha speaker, P.A. Sangma. Jyotiraditya Scindia, MP from Madhya Pradesh, is from the former royal family of Gwalior and entered politics after his father, veteran Congress leader Madhavrao Scindia, died in a plane crash. At age 26, the youngest voice among the political rookies is Muhammed Hamdulla Sayeed. He represents the sole seat from the island of Lakshadweep, which he contested after the death of his father, P.M. Sayeed, the former Union Power Minister.

New Faces

¶4. (U) While Scindia, Pilot and Sangma hail from political families, MPs like Meenakshi Natarajan and Ashok Tanwar have risen from within the Indian National Congress's student wing to national prominence after hard fought elections battles. Ashok Tanwar, part of Rahul Gandhi's handpicked coterie, was appointed President of the Indian Youth Congress in 2005. He oversaw important organizational changes, including the first-ever internal elections for officers of the Punjab Youth Congress (Ref. B). Meenakshi Natarajan was selected by Rahul Gandhi to serve as the All India Congress Committee (AICC) Secretary in 2008. In her incarnation as AICC Secretary Natarajan has been passionate about youth involvement in politics, demanding more effective and efficient delivery of rural development programs from elected officials.

Youth Induction into Ministries: Legacy in Action

¶5. (U) Jyotiraditya Scindia, 38 years old, is the new Minister of State for Commerce and Industry, a key portfolio for the U.S.-India relationship. He represents Guna in Madhya Pradesh in the 15th Lok Sabha. An active participant in parliamentary debates, the articulate Scindia is a prominent voice among the younger generation of party leaders. He was Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology in tha previous UPA government. Hailing from the former royal family of Gwalior, Scindia entered politics in 2002, following the death of his father, veteran Congress leader Madhavrao Scindia.

¶6. (SBU) Sachin Pilot, the 31-year old Minister of State for Communications and Information Technology, is a two-term member of the Lok Sabha and a first time minister. He represents the constituency of Ajmer in Rajasthan. A rising star in the Congress party, analysts believe that Pilot was assigned the Communications and IT portfolio to keep an eye on his boss, coalition partner DMK,s A. Raju, who returned as cabinet minister despite widespread accusations of large scale corruption in the issuance of telecom licenses and spectrum during his previous tenure in the first UPA government. There is also speculation that Pilot is a better fit for this portfolio because of his technical orientation and youthful vision. At 26 years of age in 2004, Pilot was the youngest elected member of the 14th Lok Sabha. His father, the late Rajesh Pilot, was a powerful Congress leader from the wealthy Gujjar community in Rajasthan. Pilot is married to Sara Abdullah, daughter of Dr. Farooq Abdullah, Minister for New and Renewable Energy and former Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir. The M.B.A grad from the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania has a loyal media following.

¶7. (U) Agatha Sangma, 28 years old, is the new Minister of State for Rural Development. Daughter of former Lok Sabha Speaker P.A Sangma, she is the youngest minister in the Council of Ministers. Sagma represents Tura in Meghalaya, a tribal-populated state in Northeastern India. She is a member of the Nationalist Congress Party, of which her father was one of the founding members in the 1990s. Promising to be "voice of the far-off North-East", the quiet Sangma is a member of the Delhi Bar Association and an amateur photographer.

Comment: No Significant Change

¶8. (SBU) Despite the clamor and excitement generated in the media by the young MPs, it is not clear if these new legislators will prove to be a formidable force in national politics. While the new crop of leaders may be modern in their outlook and western-educated, most of them were either handpicked by Rahul Gandhi or are relatives of successful politicians. In the end, these younger MPs may represent no significant change in the "old guard" of the political establishment. End Comment.

BURLEIGH